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ABSTRACT

A study examined the perceptions of four key constituent groups from the Southeast College Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) program regarding institutional goal priorities. (Southeast College manages the ADN program for the Houston Community College System.) The study involved 23 ADN faculty, 13 college administrators, 128 ADN students, and 5 ADN advisory board members. Findings indicated that only administrators perceived vocational/technical preparation to be of high importance. The faculty members perceived 12 goal areas to be of medium importance, students perceived 7, administrators perceived 14, and advisory members perceived 8. All four groups perceived the three goal areas of general education, developmental/remedial preparation, and lifelong learning to be of medium importance and humanism/altruism, cultural/aesthetic awareness, social criticism, and college community to be of low importance. Students felt that general education should be the most important goal area. Administrators and advisory members indicated that vocational/technical preparation and faculty/staff development should be the most important goals, respectively. All four groups perceived general education and developmental/remedial preparation to be of high importance as preferred goal areas. Discussion of study results was recommended to resolve areas of disagreement regarding importance of institutional goals. (Contains 14 references and a 12-item bibliography.) (YLB)

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Institutional Goal Priorities in Texas:

A Look at an Associate Degree Nursing Program

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Institutional Goals Studies

Koltai (1984) in a series of recommendations directed towards "strengthening the quality of the associate degree in order to improve its relevance and value to the student, the employer, and to the four-year institution to which the degree holder may wish to transfer" recommended that all groups involved in the community college (i.e. students, faculty, administrators, employers, community) should be pursuing the same institutional goals (p. 18). Heath (1981) concluded the following, after conducting a study of the attributes colleges would need to possess to "adapt healthily and effectively to the demands of the future" (p. 93):

> Future effectiveness as well as survival may well depend in part upon how perceptive are our questions about our own institution's ethos. As vague as the idea of "ethos" may be to some, it refers to the subjective reality to which faculty and students adapt. Hopefully organizing our understanding about ethos in terms of adaptive potentials will empower us to create more effective schools in the future. (p. 110)

Developed by the Educational Testing Service, the Community College Goals Inventory (CCGI) was drafted for the specific purpose of helping community colleges examine institutional goal priorities among constituent groups (Educational Testing Service, 1991a). Findt and Sullins (1990) utilized the CCGI to form their conclusions. After examining state legislators, presidents, academic administrators, and trustees at 22 North Carolina community colleges they determined that a general consensus existed among the groups supporting the traditional goals of vocational/technical education preparation, general education, and remedial preparation.

Hardin and Martin (1988) applied the CCGI to determine whether institutional goals had changed among key constituent groups at the State Technical Institute of Knoxville (STIK) after the institution's name was changed to the Pellissippi State Technical Community College (PSTCC). After the name change, administrators, faculty, and staff were surveyed for their perceptions concerning the goals as they currently existed and how they would prefer them to exist under the new institution's name. The researchers ascertained that the goals of vocational/technical preparation, general education and remedial/developmental education should remain the institution's areas of emphasis despite the name change.

Scope

Evaluations of ADN programs by members of the community college constituency have been undertaken to resolve possible sources leading to inconsistencies and disparities among students, faculty, administrators, and employers. Through funds partially allocated

by the Kellogg Foundation and the Midwest Alliance in Nursing (MAIN), a three-year project that involved 595 ADN programs comprising over 40 states was undertaken to resolve ways of strengthening ADN programs. The study helped to determine disparities among key groups of constituents and to uncover other undetectable concerns (Minckley & Walters, 1983).

A number of studies have been pursued in hopes of refurbishing the strength and success of ADN programs (Germanna Community College, 1989; Hardee & Worthington, 1983; Seminole Community College, 1985). After conducting a follow-up study of faculty and students to help improve the quality of the ADN program and the graduates, Scott (1982) especially detected disparities in the students' perceptions of the program. While the data concluded that 93.8% of the graduates would recommend the program to a friend, some weaknesses did surface, one of which involved graduates who felt that the time allotted between classes was inadequate. In addition, the students noted that the staff did not address their needs as students when they were enrolled in the program. Williams (1988) studied the perceptions of faculty, students, and administrators to determine the effectiveness of an ADN program and found that students, faculty, and administrators were at odds regarding the direction and mission of the institution. The study findings enabled the researcher to design a solution that implemented better communications between faculty, students, and administrators to establish institutional goal priorities.

Statement of Problem

It can be categorically concluded from the literature reviewed, that a community college's longevity, prosperity, and mission authenticity hinge on key constituencies embracing congruent goals. Researchers endorse the notion that if community colleges are to be receptive to the needs of their constituencies, congruity must exist in the priorities of institutional goals among those groups. Finally, it is apparent from the research reviewed that institutional goal priorities can be determined by performing a systematic analysis of the perceptions of key community college constituencies regarding the importance of institutional goals.

If post-secondary institutions that offer ADN programs are to maintain and improve program effectiveness, the perceptions of major constituent groups should be studied to construct the foundation for decisions that lead to program effectiveness and institutional longevity. A study was undertaken to determine the degree of similarities and differences between major constituent groups at one post-secondary institution regarding their perceptions of existing and desired institutional goal priorities.

Statement of Purpose

In Texas, community colleges provide education to approximately 50% of all students enrolled in higher education. Of the projected 10.3 million Texas jobs available in the year 2000, over 1.8 million will require at least one year of post-secondary education. Specifically, nursing/allied health occupations (i.e., dental assistant, medical assistant, nursing) are expected to experience the largest annual growth until the year 2000 (Texas Employment Commission, 1991). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, faculty, administrators, and program advisory board members

regarding institutional goal priorities at a Texas post-secondary institution that offered an ADN program.

Methodology

Houston Community College System (HCCS), one of 38 Texas post-secondary institutions offering Associate Degree Nursing programs, was selected as the institution investigated for the study. HCCS is a multi-campus community college system consisting of six regional colleges, one of which is the Southeast College that manages the ADN program for HCCS. During the period 1989-1991, HCCS awarded 358 Associate Degree Nursing degrees; second highest in the state. In addition, when compared to other public Associate Degree Nursing programs in the state, HCCS' Associate Degree Nursing program has experienced the largest growth in student enrollment during the past two years.

Sample

The study examined the perceptions of four key constituent groups from the Southeast College ADN program regarding institutional goal priorities. Involved were 23 ADN faculty, 13 college administrators, 128 ADN students, and 5 ADN advisory board members. Cluster sampling was employed to identify the student subjects for the study. The elements (students in their final semester of study) were found in 1 of 16 clusters (classes). Nine classes of students were randomly selected utilizing a random digits table (Borg & Gall, 1983). All 128 students enrolled in the randomly selected classes were surveyed.

Summary

Only the administrators perceived vocational/technical preparation to be "of high importance." The faculty members perceived that 12 goal areas were "of medium importance," the students perceived 7, the administrators 14, and the advisory members 8. The three goal areas of general education, developmental/remedial preparation, and lifelong learning were perceived "of medium importance," and humanism/altruism, cultural/aesthetic awareness, social criticism, and college community were perceived to be "of low importance" by all four groups.

Concerning preferred importance of goals, only the students rated a goal less than "of medium importance" on the scale. The faculty constituency preferred the importance of four goals to be "of high importance." The students rated 8, the administrators 16, and the advisory board members rated 13 similarly. The students felt that general education should be the most important goal area. The administrators and advisory board members indicated that vocational/technical preparation and faculty/staff development should be the most important goals, respectively. Two groups, faculty and student, affirmed that freedom should be the least preferred among the "of medium importance" goal areas. General education and developmental/remedial preparation were perceived "of high importance" as preferred goal areas by all four groups. Three goal areas were considered "of medium importance" as preferred by all constituencies: accessibility, social criticism, and freedom. In terms of means, vocational/technical preparation, general education, and developmental/remedial preparation were among the top 10 most important current and

preferred goal areas by all four groups. Three goal areas were among the 10 least important current and preferred goal areas: intellectual environment, social criticism, and cultural/aesthetic awareness.

Conclusions

In general, the results of the study were consistent with previous research in the field of institutional goal studies. All groups felt that the goal areas should be more important than they are currently being perceived in order to exist. Data analysis found some discrepancies to be significantly different. The faculty members had 11 significantly different discrepancies, all 20 goal areas were significantly different for the students, the administrators had 17, and the advisory members had 8 significantly different discrepancies. Only general education and developmental/remedial preparation were preferred to be "of high importance" as goals for the college; no one goal was preferred to be most important by all four groups.

Although the groups could not reach agreement on the goal that should be the most important for the college, there were similarities among the groups regarding the current importance of six goal areas. Four goal areas (developmental/remedial preparation, vocational/technical preparation, general education, and lifelong learning) were perceived to be "of medium importance" by the four constituencies. College community and cultural aesthetic awareness were considered "of low importance." This indicates that the groups perceive the traditional goals of the community college (a student's quality of education, commitment to non-traditional students, accommodation of adequate remedial programs, and the attainment of occupational competence) to be more important than formulating a climate in which there is faculty and staff communication.

Differences concerning current importance of three goals (community services, vocational/technical preparation, and counseling and advising) proved significant among the students and administrators. The students perceived their occupational training not to be the most important goal. The administrators, on the other hand, perceived that vocational/technical preparation was the most important current goal.

The findings reveal that all four constituent groups perceived that more could be done in all the 20 goal areas. This came as no surprise since people naturally tend to expect better services. What is most revealing and significant to the study is that disparities exist in the current perceptions of goal areas. This occurrence demonstrates that the groups are not perceiving the direction and purpose of the college in the same way. All groups perceived the current importance of college community (see Table 1), a goal area that purports "open and candid communication, open and amicable airing of differences, and mutual trust and respect among faculty, students, and administrators" to be "of low importance" (Educational Testing Service, 1991b, form 57208-Y44P.1-241841). All groups, however, preferred that college community should be ranked among the most important goals of the institution. Consequently, the great number of disparities could perhaps be attributed to the fact that the groups do not hold communication and openness to be among the most important goal of the college.

Another group disparity that merits commentary concerns the goal area of community services, which is defined as being "concerned with the college's relationship with the community: encouraging community use of college resources (meeting rooms, computer facilities, faculty skills), conducting community forums on topical issues,

promoting cooperation among diverse community organizations to improve availability of services, and working with local government agencies, industry, unions, and other groups on community problems" (Educational Testing Service, 1991b, form 57208-Y44P.1-241841). The faculty group rated it "of low importance" as both a current and preferred goal. On the other hand, the students rated it "of low importance" as a current goal, but preferred that it should be "of medium importance." The administrators and advisory members felt that it was "of medium importance" currently, but would prefer to see it be "of high importance." The disparity among the faculty members and the rest of the groups regarding the scale value of this goal reiterates the perception held constant by the ADN faculty members: the primary mission of the ADN program should be preparing students for workplace responsibilities. In addition, low response rate by faculty to the survey supports sentiment that ADN faculty are pursuing only the traditional community college goals of vocational/technical preparation and general education. The faculty should broaden their perspective on the mission of the college to include not only the interests of the individual learners, but also the interests of the various constituencies they serve.

Table 1
Goals With Increases From "Of Low Importance" to "Of High Importance" Ranking by Group Constituencies

Group	Goal		
Faculty	Student	Administrator	Advisory
College Community	College Community Counseling & Advising Personal Development	College Community	College Community Counseling & Advising
		Humanism/Altruism Intellecutual Environment	Humanism/Altruism
			Accountability Effective Management Innovation

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in reference to the conclusions reached from the study involving ADN faculty, ADN students, college administrators, and ADN advisory board members of the Southeast College:

1. Discussion on the results of the study among the constituent groups involved may be useful in resolving areas of disagreement regarding the importance of institutional goals. This can be realized by fortifying established institutional linkages and by augmenting the current mediums of communication among the groups. The lifeline of an institution is its ability to communicate both internally and externally. Specifically, the

administrators could demonstrate to the faculty members (who perceived that faculty/staff development was "of low importance" currently) that their stability and interests as faculty members are of concern. This could perhaps be accomplished by providing educational opportunities that are aimed at strengthening awareness and understanding of their roles as one of many constituencies that comprise the community college. In addition, with the influx of computer technology and sophisticated communications in almost every facet of community college activity, there is no excuse why staff, faculty, and administrators could not exchange ideas, concerns and strategies. A strategy to reduce the communication gap among the faculty and administrators would be for the college to provide incentives for faculty/administrator collaborative initiatives with public and private organizations.

2. The most significant of the internal variables of an institution is, perhaps, leadership. In striving to achieve program excellence, college administrators and their board of trustees should subject the mission of the college to the consistent changes driving the internal climate of the college. The leadership of the Southeast College should, therefore, consider training and retraining initiatives needed to insure harmony, allegiance, and cohesion to shared goals critical to the institution's effectiveness.

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